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Chairman: Mr. Al-Hinai ..... (Oman)

Contents

Agenda item 115: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 115: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/56/203, A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/342-S/2001/852, A/56/453 and A/56/488)

1. **Mr. Ahsan** (Bangladesh) said that near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had not brought about the enjoyment of those rights, and it was therefore encouraging to note the broad agreement on the draft outcome document of the postponed special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A world fit for children" (A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3).

2. Bangladesh was paying particular attention to the vulnerability of the girl child, and had developed national machinery, in addition to programmes in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the private sector and its development partners. Two areas, education and health care, should be highlighted to illustrate improvements in the situation of children. Primary education had been made compulsory in 1990. The National Plan of Action on Education for All had resulted in improved literacy rates, and special incentives to increase female enrolment had helped to reduce the gender disparity in primary schools. In the health sector, successful intervention had resulted in a significant decline in infant mortality, and over 85 per cent of children had been reached by the WHO/UNICEF Expanded Programme of Immunization.

3. Looking ahead, information-gathering had begun on such issues as child labour and sexual exploitation. The apparel industry was successfully phasing out child labour, with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF. Special focus was also being placed on urban children in especially difficult circumstances; homes, schools and training centres had been set up to meet the needs of street children, abandoned children and children with disabilities.

4. A national advisory committee had been established to combat trafficking in persons, especially children, and programmes aimed at raising awareness and capacity among law-enforcement agencies had been undertaken. National efforts had been complemented by regional initiatives, including the elaboration of a draft regional convention against trafficking, which was awaiting adoption. The situ of children affected by armed conflict remained a of particular concern. The international comm including the United Nations, must be prepar intervene on their behalf.

5. **Mr. Gansukh** (Mongolia) said that his deleg welcomed the progress made in finalizing the outcome document of the special session on ch and hoped that the momentum for the promotio protection of the rights of children would continu

6. Mongolia attached particular importanc children's issues, since nearly half of its popu was under the age of 18. Recent measures to im the relevant legal framework had included ratifi of the Convention on the Rights of the Child an Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child l His Government intended to sign the two op protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the on the involvement of children in armed conflic on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, in the near future. National legis had been brought into line with current realitie with obligations under international treaties. A example, the 1996 Law Protecting Children's R placed particular emphasis on the protectio children living in difficult circumstances.

7. The Government had included specific actio child survival, protection and development i national poverty-alleviation programmes. Neverth it still faced serious challenges from the gr number of street children, hungry children and s drop-outs. The Government attached high priority social policy, and was actively cooperating international organizations to ensure a better futu its children.

8. **Ms. Molaroni** (San Marino) said that San M had been among the first countries to sign th optional protocols to the Convention on the Rig the Child, and expected to ratify them in the future.

9. Among priorities for the protection of chi disease prevention through vaccination was the way to stop children from dying from such tre diseases as polio and malaria. HIV/AIDS was an major threat to children; besides killing many ch outright, it also killed their parents, leaving or who could not provide for themselves. The best w lessen its impact on children was to make

possible effort to contain the spread of the infection and to make treatment accessible to everyone. Although children in the developed world might suffer from obesity, for most of the world, adequate food and clean water could not be taken for granted. Education lay at the heart of health, development and peace, yet 130 million children, 60 per cent of them girls, did not have access to education. Education should be available to boys and girls without distinction.

10. In conclusion, her delegation appealed to all countries to ratify the optional protocols to the Convention, which were valuable tools for protecting children.

11. **Mr. Kasemsarn** (Thailand) said that the best interests of children must be the cross-cutting concern in all national and international efforts towards peace and development. Since children were a living asset for national development, Thailand had redoubled its efforts to lift them out of poverty, malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy. Of particular concern to his Government were the continued widespread use of illicit drugs among children and youth and the impact of HIV/AIDS on children. The needs of affected children had been an integral part of the comprehensive national AIDS strategy.

12. Children could not live in health and dignity if they faced the risk of abuse or exploitation. Therefore, Thailand had enacted laws and implemented programmes to safeguard them. It had become a party to ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and would soon sign the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Its close cooperation with other countries in the subregion in addressing the problem of trafficking in women and children had met with some success. It was also beginning the process of ratifying the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

13. The Government had also undertaken a reform of the national educational system, inter alia by extending compulsory education from 9 to 12 years, increasing access for disadvantaged and disabled children, and utilizing new information and communications technologies. The crucial role and responsibility of families in the protection and development of children must be underscored as well, and the Government and all actors in society must support them.

14. **Ms. Yanagawa** (Japan) said that her delegation considered that the special session would be the ideal opportunity for sharing views with all actors on child-related issues, in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration and its follow-up. Despite its postponement, her Government would continue to contribute to the success of the special session and to the outcome document.

15. In that regard, Japan, deeply concerned at the plight of children whose rights were seriously violated, had volunteered to host the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in cooperation with other international bodies, in Yokohama in December 2001.

16. The objectives of the Congress were to review progress in implementing the Agenda for Action, which, with its accompanying Declaration, had been adopted by the first Congress, held in Stockholm in 1996, and to strengthen measures to eradicate that scourge. The Congress would focus on five main themes: child pornography, sexual exploitation, child trafficking, private-sector involvement, legislation and law enforcement, and the profile of the sex exploiter.

17. The organizers hoped for broad participation, including that of civil society and young people, and called on Member States to send high-level delegations. Governments were encouraged to play an active role, inasmuch as the results of consultations in the various regions planned by UNICEF in preparation for the Congress would yield an important input.

18. Drawing attention to the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in and around Afghanistan, soon to be in the throes of a harsh winter, she expressed appreciation for the actions taken by various partners, including the visits by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to the region. She enjoined the international community to forestall a repetition of the tragic deaths of children in a camp in Afghanistan earlier in 2001.

19. Her Government would continue to support such efforts in order to ensure that the necessary humanitarian aid from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations reached those in need, especially children in that area, and reaffirmed its commitment to creating a better world for children.

20. **Mr. Ingólfsson** (Iceland) said that a new date for the postponed special session should be set as a matter of urgency in order to facilitate children's participation and maintain the momentum of national undertakings, such as his own Parliament's recent resolution providing for a five-year national plan of action on children and youth to start in 2002, for which the outcome of the special session would be an important input.

21. His country had ratified the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and urged those States which had not done so to sign and ratify them before the special session. It was convinced of the appropriateness of the rights-based approach of the Convention and recommended that the importance of its implementation, including the right of children to be protected against violence, should be reflected in the outcome document of the special session.

22. Violence against children had been receiving greater attention from the Icelandic authorities. In an effort to address sexual violence more effectively while minimizing the negative impact on children, in 1998 his Government had established a multi-agency centre known as the Children's House, where professionals from various disciplines worked in partnership to investigate child sexual-abuse cases and provided treatment for child victims and their families.

23. The basic concept was to avoid traumatizing child victims through repeated interviews, which could also distort their stories. Accordingly, a trained investigator conducted the interview, which was observed in a different room by the judge, a social worker, the police, the prosecution, defence attorneys and the child's advocate; it was also videotaped and could be used in court. The child could then undergo a medical examination there.

24. Iceland had advocated the inclusion in the outcome document of a provision for appropriate treatment and rehabilitation of child victims of drug and alcohol abuse. Although prevention was its watchword, the Government had also devised a comprehensive child-specific treatment and rehabilitation system, as recommended by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

25. Since work on the outcome document of the special session had been well advanced, discussion of agreed language should not be reopened. His delegation welcomed the initiative to submit a procedural resolution under the agenda item instead of the usual omnibus resolution.

26. **Mrs. Blajan** (Romania) said her delegation hoped that the positive and dynamic approach of actions in favour of children would be developed in the coming months, despite the postponement of the special session. Her delegation remained committed to participation in the special session at the highest political level, and to children's participation in the planned local, national and international events, which would enhance the visibility of the session. It was also in favour of a strong declaration and programme of action that would orient future child-protection policies.

27. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had served as the basis for her Government's effective legislative and institutional measures for protecting children's rights and establishing an environment in which they could develop their capacities. Its provisions were fully reflected in the country's domestic legislation and institutional practices.

28. The Government's Strategy for the Protection of Children in Difficulty (2001-2004) was aimed at enhancing coordination among the various child-protection bodies at all levels in an effort to provide a durable solution to many challenges posed by the plethora of abandoned, disabled or institutionalized children, and the existence of long-term institutions that failed to meet children's need for a family environment.

29. Accordingly, with the support of its international partners, Romania was endeavouring to prevent and reduce child-abandonment by helping families in difficulty and increasing alternative solutions, such as substitute families, reintegration of children with their families, and the downsizing of residential institutions to make them more family-like. One of many initiatives for street children was the Medical-Social Unit for the Recovery and Reintegration of Street Children, about to be opened.

30. While the ongoing reform of the adoption laws favoured national adoption, it aimed to set coherent and transparent procedures for both national and international adoption, ensuring that the best interest of the child was paramount. Indeed, a framework law on the protection of the rights of the child was in course of preparation. Her delegation was convinced that, with

adequate financial and human resources, those measures would improve the lot of Romanian children.

31. Protecting children from the effects of armed conflict was a priority that called for concerted action by all concerned, in which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, currently chaired by Romania, had an important role to play. It was to be hoped that that organization's document on the subject would soon be finalized.

32. She welcomed the fact that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would enter into force in January 2002, following her country's recent deposit of the tenth instrument of ratification. She hoped that the requisite number of ratifications would soon be mustered for the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which Romania had also ratified.

33. **Ms. Fonseca** (Venezuela) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Rio Group. The welfare of children was a priority for Venezuela. The 1999 Constitution incorporated fundamental elements of the principles of protection embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a law providing specific protection for children and adolescents had been in force since April 2000. Furthermore, the Government had taken various initiatives to ensure that children and adolescents could participate in the formulation of the public policies that concerned them.

34. Venezuela was firmly committed to supporting the special session on children. It hoped that the final document would reflect the principal values, goals and achievements relating to children, be guided by their needs and seek to ensure them full enjoyment of their rights.

35. Venezuela was trying to attain a social balance that would rectify the distortions caused by exclusion and injustice; a fairer distribution of resources would lead to a decline in poverty, reducing its impact on children, adolescents and families. Gender equality was a cross-cutting theme of the Constitution; thus, both boy and girl children were guaranteed full enjoyment of their rights. Similarly, indigenous children and adolescents were ensured health care and an intercultural and bilingual education that took into account their socio-cultural characteristics and their values and traditions.

36. Despite Venezuela's unfavourable economic situation, its effort to improve the condition of children had led to decreases in mortality, low birth weight, neonatal tetanus and malnutrition. The Government had taken specific measures to combat HIV/AIDS; in the area of food security, it had implemented a programme of direct subsidies to the most vulnerable groups, including a school meal programme and a high-calorie meal programme; working mothers had access to day care and there was a programme to provide non-formal education to children and adolescents who worked. Over 90 per cent of children under five had been registered in the Civil Registry, thus ensuring their right to citizenship, and 90 per cent of primary-school-age children attended school.

37. Venezuela had signed the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 2000 and was in the process of ratifying them.

38. **Mr. Ahmed** (Iraq) said that hundreds of millions of children worldwide were victims of physical abuse, in particular owing to armed conflict, economic sanctions, sexual aggression and dysfunctional families. It was incumbent on the international community to implement the various international instruments which asserted that children should enjoy special protection to ensure their complete moral, spiritual, social and economic welfare, in an appropriate environment. His Government was doing its utmost, particularly in the fields of health and education, to ensure the physical and intellectual welfare of children to enable them to become useful members of society.

39. According to United Nations statistics, Iraq had achieved a higher rate of economic and social development than other countries in the region. The gross national product had increased by 10 per cent from 1974 to 1980, before economic sanctions had been imposed. Nearly the entire urban population and over three quarters of the rural population had enjoyed total health coverage. Iraq had also made an important investment in literacy programmes and compulsory education at the primary level.

40. Since the imposition of the sanctions, Iraq had moved from relative prosperity to absolute poverty. Its children had been the first victims of the sanctions;

infant mortality had risen to become one of the highest in the world. The accumulated effects of economic sanctions had resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million Iraqis, mostly children. A large number of children under five had died from diarrhoeal, pulmonary and respiratory diseases and malnutrition. Nearly two thirds of a million children had died over the past 10 years, because sanctions affected the Government's ability to provide services in such areas as health, education, drinking water, transport, energy and communications.

41. Added to the mass killing of Iraqi children owing to sanctions was the use of depleted uranium by the United States and the United Kingdom in 1991. The following year, 50,000 children had died from radiation and there had been high rates of birth defects, leukaemia and other types of cancer.

42. The disastrous effects of sanctions were well known and had been condemned repeatedly by the United Nations, and also by the Secretary-General, who had drawn the attention of the Security Council to their dire consequences. Human-rights organizations, United Nations specialized agencies and well-known legal and political figures had also indicated their concern about the situation of children in Iraq and had called on the United States to remove the sanctions.

43. **Mr. Niehaus** (Costa Rica) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Rio Group. The rights of the child were a priority of his Government, which had signed the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was in the process of ratifying them. In the same spirit, it had amended its domestic legislation in order to ensure full compliance with the Convention.

44. His delegation trusted that the special session on children would be held during the first part of 2002. It would allow the international community to examine achievements and analyse the difficulties encountered in implementing the Convention. His delegation was surprised that States, having signed the Convention, had not adopted all sections of the draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children". It was particularly concerned by discussions on the meaning of the terms "health services" and "reproductive health", because some had tried to distort the definition agreed upon in previous documents adopted at United Nations international conferences. Costa Rica considered that those expressions could never signify recognition of the right to abortion or the possibility of legalizing it.

45. **Mr. Leal Cordeiro** (Angola) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community. Despite the postponement of the special session, children continued to be a priority and the rights of girls should be given the same protection as those of boys. His delegation noted that slight emphasis had been given to the issue of the girl child in the draft outcome document of the special session, entitled "A world fit for children", and it encouraged Member States to reflect on that issue in order to strengthen the relevant part of the document.

46. At the World Education Forum held at Dakar in April 2000, world leaders had committed themselves to achieving education for all by the year 2015. However, one year later there had been minimal progress. If the world was serious about meeting that target, a coherent and concerted multilateral effort was required, such as an international budget based on the UNICEF 20/20 Initiative.

47. In Angola children lived in extremely precarious conditions; about one child in every ten was displaced, 90,000 had been disabled by landmines and over 40 per cent were affected by diseases, such as malaria and polio. Most had been exposed to the horrors of war and 15 per cent had lost either father or mother. The war had weakened the institutional capacity to improve the situation of children. Lack of education undermined efforts to improve health, nutrition and economic prospects, and affected good governance and the exercise of fundamental rights.

48. It was both essential and possible to reverse those trends, and the Government was taking steps to promote national peace and reconciliation, attend to children directly involved in the armed conflict, and improve the national education system and the vaccination programme.

49. It hoped that increased funds would be made available by the international community to help improve conditions for children worldwide.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.